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Targeted Wage Initiative

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The better attached someone is to the labor market the higher the likelihood they will stay on the job and advance in wages. Current data shows that increasing the wage of entry-level jobs can affect the rate of TANF returns and the rate at which customers advance in wages over time.

The Targeted Wage Initiative (TWI) fits within the WorkFirst philosophy and service delivery design. The proposed changes strengthen existing activities, but do not change the concept of assisting families to increase their income through employment. In this approach, the labor market remains the test for employability and Job Search is the first activity for most customers.

Step One: Screening and Support for TWI Customers

- Positive expectations for WorkFirst begin with the DSHS case manager.
- Case managers will use an employment centered case management approach that focuses on moving clients toward employment whenever possible and as soon as possible.
- Customers who are able to participate in Job Search are referred immediately to ESD.
- Through the screening process case managers will continue to identify issues that prevent the customer from actively engaging in the Job Search process (such as inability to find suitable child care, domestic violence, or substance abuse).
- One of the primary roles of case managers is to assist these customers to overcome or manage the issues that prevent participation in Job Search.
- Case managers give every customer an orientation to the services and the wide range of opportunities that are available to them through participation in the WorkFirst program.
- Case managers assist every customer to understand what is in it for them.
- Case managers will be actively involved when needed to keep customers in Job Search.
- Case managers will take immediate and appropriate action on all customers who do not attend Job Search. The focus of the action will be to return the customer to Job Search as soon as possible.

Step Two: Work Skills Assessment

The first activity of Job Search is assessment. Employment Security has the responsibility to develop and conduct an initial assessment with partner involvement that allows every customer to evaluate their interests, aptitudes, and skills, and to identify targeted wage placements within the local labor market. The assessment provides basic information to all partners and customers who are able to look for work – even to those whose next step may be full-time training instead of Job Search.

Best practices show the Work Skills Assessment elements include:

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- An orientation process that moves the customer into employment with higher wages and better job retention opportunities.
- Completion of a Work Skills Assessment using an appropriate assessment tool.
- Job matching through an online tool to match skills and interests to available jobs.
- Goal setting and motivation to help customers find their focus and map their plan.
- Assessment for enrollment into training prior to entering employment.
- Development of a Success Plan.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the customer will develop a Success Plan with the help of ESD staff and identify one of the following targeted-wage participation tracks:

- Track One: Customer stays engaged with ESD for Targeted Job Search (e.g. Job Search training, job development, employer engagement, and optional short-term training)
- Track Two: Referral to college for Customized Job Skills Training
- Track Three: Referral to college for High-Wage, High-Demand training

If staff discovers that a customer is unable to participate in one of the three targeted wage participation tracks, they will refer the customer back to DSHS for another activity, such as Community Jobs or Alternative Services.

All targeted-wage participation tracks will require participation and focus on getting the customer higher-wage initial employment.

All customers who have gone through the front-end process and are enrolled in one of the three targeted wage participation tracks but fail to participate as required without good cause will go into sanction status following the current sanction process. Those who wish to cure their sanction through participation would go to Targeted Job Search.

Referral to Customized Job Skills Training (CJST) and High Wage High Demand Training (HW/HD) will still be made through Job Search. With the inception of the Work Skills Assessment, customers referred for training will already know if they meet the requirements for participation.

Targeted Job Search

Targeted Wage Initiative is a partner-driven effort, which enhances services to Job Search. ESD plays the significant role in facilitating this approach.

Targeted Job Search is an individualized focused Job Search approach that blends group activities, competency building workshops and job clubs that better prepare customers for the labor market.

The enhanced Job Search process includes activities for the entire 12 weeks a customer is participating. The activities are to be structured and focused in such a way as to assist customers to find the best employment as soon as possible.

The Work Skills Assessment is the cornerstone of the activities that the customers engage in throughout their participation in Job Search. The assessment directs customers to specific employers and specific opportunities to enhance their employability.

The twelve weeks of Job Search is to be segmented into three parts, all of which are equal in intensity and design, but each of which has specific activities and focus.

The expectation is that individual customers have **up to four weeks** to complete their Job Search Competencies. Depending upon an individual customer's competencies, customers could move through the segments more rapidly.

Staff will interact with customers each day to coach and monitor the Job Search to be sure customers are participating as required and to determine whether the activities they are engaged in assist them in finding employment. The staff will also conduct weekly reviews of each participant's Job Search to determine whether the activities that the customer is engaged in are the right combination of activities to assist them in finding the highest wage employment possible in their labor market.

At the end of four, eight, and twelve weeks, each customer will receive an in-depth evaluation. This evaluation will help staff and customers plan, review and revise expectations of the Job Search activities. The evaluation will help determine if they need additional services or different services to be effective in their Job Search process. Any customer approaching 12 weeks of Job Search should participate in a case staffing with the partners prior to being referred back to DSHS.

The four-week segments will include the following:

First Four Weeks

During the first four weeks of Job Search, customers will be prepared to market themselves to employers through intensive Job Search preparation activities and will be directed toward the highest wage, entry-level jobs.

Customers will be assisted in the development of a set of Job Search and employment competencies. A checklist showing successful completion of these competencies will be documented by a Job Search specialist before a customer moves into the employer engagement segment of the Job Search process.

The targeted wage during this segment of Job Search will be the wage identified for a local office in the feeder measure based on historical WorkFirst hires in the local area.

Second Four Weeks

The focus of the second four weeks of Job Search will be to continue to use the Job Search skills learned during the first four weeks, build competencies, and to add some specific job development activities to connect customers with employers.

Customers will continue to participate in activities such as job clubs, Job Hunter Modules and using the resource room to refine Job Search competencies.

Customers will be actively engaged with employers through staff assisted job development in targeted interviews, hiring events, and on-the-job training options.

The targeted wages will continue to be based on the wage identified in the feeder measure, as in the first four weeks of targeted Job Search.

Third Four Weeks

The final four weeks of Job Search will expand the focus to all jobs for which the customer is qualified, including minimum-wage jobs. The focus will then become applying to as many employers as possible to find employment.

Returners

Case Managers at DSHS will identify Returners and screen for any significant issues or barriers. There are few issues that will defer a customer from Job Search, but most will be addressed while a customer is in Job Search. Job-ready customers are referred to ESD to begin Job Search activities.

At ESD, staff will determine if the customer has participated in the Work Skills Assessment and completed the job skills competencies in the last three months. If not, the customer will be scheduled for these activities. If the customer has participated in assessment and competency completion in the last three months, they will update their Success Plan and then begin targeted Job Search. Returners will receive all services available to any Job Search customer.

Employment Skills Training

Employment Skills Training incorporated into Job Search will be offered to customers. This training is employment skills specific, but not necessarily employer specific, and is designed to enhance one's immediate employability. It is very short-term and designed with the needs of the local labor market in mind.

For example, one local office may determine that most employers who hire office workers in the area prefer applicants who can function in Microsoft Office software. The Employment Skills Training would be offered so that customers could learn these specific employment skills, while also conducting their Job Search activities.

The Employer Connection

Throughout the enhanced Job Search activities, making the best use of the job development opportunities and connections with employers will be essential to the process. Regular, frequent communication between Business Outreach staff and all partners is essential for program success. This is a key element in being able to use the Work Skills Assessment information most effectively and for positively impacting the jobs and wages customers obtain. Some of the strategies include:

- Job matching with local employers using the Work Skills Assessment information
- On-the-Job Training

- Facilitated engagement of WorkFirst customers in local, quarterly, hiring events
- Coordination with WorkSource Business Outreach events/services

Post Employment Follow-up and Support

ESD WorkFirst will continue to provide wage progression and retention services to customers who have exited TANF.

Client/Service Impact

- Increased customer competency finding and retaining employment.
- Better information to develop Success Plans that lay out the customer's short-term and long-term goals and wage progression and retention activities.
- Increased up-front interaction with customers developing their career goals.
- Better information to develop an Individual Responsibility Plan that lays out the customer's chosen route to higher wage employment.
- Additional motivation to pursue high-wage, stable employment.
- Increased access to better jobs that meet the needs of both job seekers and business.
- Greater access to training that leads to higher wages and job retention.

TWI Outcomes

The primary outcome is to maximize the number of employments in 90 days.

This will be measured by the increase in:

- the number of customers employed; and
- the increased entry-level wage at employment.

TWI Process Measures

- Percent of customers who complete the Work Skills Assessment (WSA).
- Percent of customers who complete Job Search Competencies (JSC).
- Better engagement of customers and fewer referrals back for non-participation.
- Improved enrollment-to-referral ratio for Customized Jobs Skills Training (CJST).
- Track the number of hiring events, number of employers engaged by company size and industry classification and employments achieved.
- The median wage at 4, 8 and 12 weeks of employment

NOTE: In order for offices to receive credit for the Work Skills Assessment (WSA) and Job Search Competencies (JSC) process measures, it is imperative that staff document these activities in CATS immediately upon completion. For WSA, the documentation must be entered no later than 15 business days from the JS start date (includes the JS start date as one of the fifteen days). For JSC, the documentation must be entered no later than 20 business days from the JS start date (includes the JS start date as one of the 20 days).

Summary

The purpose of the Targeted Wage Initiative is to better prepare customers up front with a Work Skills Assessment and local labor market information, Job Search Skills Competencies and Business Outreach engagement in order to get the highest paying wage the first time employed.

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